

Anyone Got a Deer Whistle?

by LCdr. Brian Travers

It was my first flight in the squadron after completing the IUT syllabus at TW-5. What a good deal: a mid-afternoon brief for a day-into-night out and in. Comfortable spring weather covered northwest Florida.

After briefing and filing for a VFR out and in to nearby Florala Municipal Airport (which all Whiting-based IPs know is home to some good complimentary burritos), we preflighted and launched. It was a primary RI flight, and the stud did a good job. After finishing the event, I told him to lower the hood, enjoy the flight and be ready for the VFR entry into Florala. We landed and relaxed

instructor hop, with danger of deer on the runway. I pondered my options: Let someone else come out and launch ahead of me, take my chances with the deer, or take off with the landing lights off. As I sat and wondered, an Army H-1 doing touch-and-goes on the runway distracted me. Then I had an idea. I spun up the CTAF freq on the VHF and called the Huey. "Hey, you mind making a low pass down the runway to scare off the wildlife? I've got reports of deer on the runway."

"No sweat, you ready to go now?"

"Yup, I'll be following you as soon as you turn clear to the left, and I'll be making the takeoff straight ahead, with a departure to the right."

As I approached the hold-short, I shut off my landing lights. The Huey made a low pass at about 20 feet and 50 to 60 knots, with lights blazing and making all the noise a Huey can muster. As he passed me, I taxied to the position and hold, and flipped the landing lights back on. Once he started his climb to clear the trees, I set takeoff power while holding the brakes. As he went through about a 45-degree turn, I released the brakes for takeoff. The takeoff roll went textbook, and we got out without incident. As we cleared to the southwest, I called back to inform the other T-34s manning up for the night launch about the deer problem. Everyone got out safely, and the Army guys got extra low-pass practice. I don't remember the student's name or how the second event went, but the few minutes trying to come up with a deer-removal plan are as clear as if they happened yesterday. Go figure! 🦅

LCdr. Travers flew with VT-2 when this incident occurred and is now with VR-62.

as we grabbed a bite to eat and debriefed the event. Five other T-34s were parked on the ramp. The crews were in the FBO, eating and waiting for sunset so they could launch on night events.

After an hour on deck, and 45 minutes after sunset, we manned up for the second event. As I strapped in and got the avionics on line, I caught the tail end of an aircraft radio transmission warning of deer on the runway. Great, I thought, I'm at an unfamiliar field, in the dark, on my first

Helo photo by Master Sgt. Raymond T. Conway
Photo-composite by Patricia Eaton